

STATE OF ALASKA

Frank H. Murkowski, Governor

PANDEMIC INFLUENZA INTERAGENCY INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

P.O. Box 5750
Ft. Richardson, AK 99505-5750
Phone: (907) 428-7000
Fax: (907) 428-7009
www.ak-prepared.com

For Immediate Release:

February 28, 2006

State Takes Action to Plan, Prepare For Avian Influenza and Pandemic Influenza

(Anchorage, AK) – The State Departments of Military and Veterans Affairs and Health and Social Services, in response to Governor Frank Murkowski’s Administrative Order (AO) No. 228, have formed a Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Group and an Interagency Incident Management Team (IMT) to lead Alaska’s efforts to plan and prepare for avian influenza reaching Alaska and for a possible outbreak of pandemic influenza.

“The IMT is made up of representatives from local, State, and Federal agencies who are working together developing a public outreach plan to educate and inform Alaskans on avian and pandemic flu, and to develop a response plan in case the flu strain mutates and leads to a pandemic flu event here in the State,” said Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) Deputy Director for Emergency Management Jim Butchart. Butchart serves as the IMT’s Incident Commander.

“The MAC Group is made up of 26 agencies, to include the Governor’s Office, and is chaired by the Commissioners of the lead State departments named in AO 228, Military and Veterans Affairs and Health and Social Services. This group’s primary function is to provide policy and priority direction to the IMT,” continued Butchart.

Unlike seasonal influenza, pandemic influenza is caused when a new influenza virus develops, is easily spread, and causes widespread illness and death because people have no immunity to the new virus. Pandemic influenza strains are thought to develop because of genetic changes in influenza viruses that have infected birds and other animals.

Today, wild fowl continue to transmit the latest strain of avian flu, known as H5N1, to domestic poultry stocks from Asia to Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. People who have contracted the H5N1 virus thus far have had contact with infected domestic poultry or have come in contact with the bodily fluids of infected birds. To date, no cases of infections have been found in persons who have handled wild birds. Additionally, there are no reports of the H5N1 strain being passed from person to person, however, world health officials believe that the virus could mutate and be able to be spread person to person. Therefore, health officials are preparing for a possible pandemic outbreak.

-MORE-

STATE OF ALASKA

"Right now, avian flu has not reached Alaska and Alaskans are not at risk," said Dr. Richard Mandsager, State Director of Public Health. He added that if the current strain of H5N1 reaches the state, most Alaskans will not be at risk unless they are in close, regular contact with domestic poultry. "If the H5N1 virus were to change form and acquire the ability to spread easily from person to person, the State would put into place its plan to mitigate the effects of a pandemic in our state" he said. "Health officials can't say for sure if that will happen, but we are preparing for that scenario just in case."

To learn what you, your family, or your business can do to prepare for avian and pandemic flu, please go to www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov. For more information on the IMT or MAC Group, contact the DHS&EM Public Information Office at 907-428-7052.

###